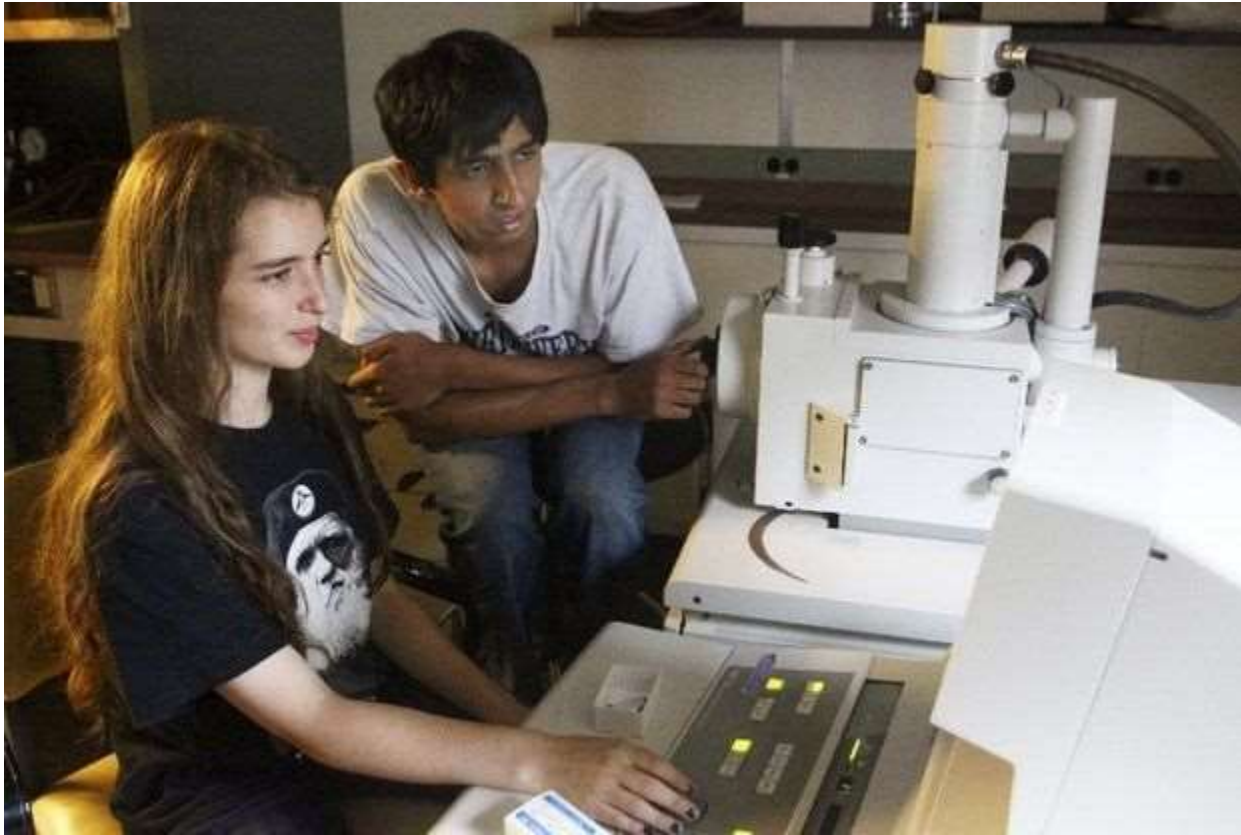


## Top high school students study science at annual Governor's School



Maria Shea and Praveen Srinivasan, from Academy of St. Elizabeth and Randolph High Schools, respectively, use a scanning electron microscope to look at a sample of pumice stone. (*Alex Remnick/The Star-Ledger*)

By [Jeanette Rundquist/The Star-Ledger](#)

on August 05, 2013 at 7:00 AM, updated August 05, 2013 at 7:01 AM

[MADISON](#) — The computers are more powerful and the computer programming languages have changed.

The research topics now include the impact of global warming.

Even the group photograph is different. When New Jersey's Governor's School in the Sciences welcomed its first class of high school students in 1984, a professional photographer snapped a black-and-white portrait of the group. Nowadays, a digital photo is taken.

The Governor's School in the Sciences, a summer program that brings top high school students to Drew University for three weeks to study and research topics such as neuroscience and cell biology, concluded its 30th class last week.

And while many things have changed, the program at Drew — which survived funding cuts that shuttered all but one other Governor's School — remains strong.

The fact that it is very selective — there were more than 350 applicants for 85 spots in the Drew program this year — and is free for students makes it very prestigious, experts say.

"Part of the prestige is that the state is investing in these students. They've selected the top students and are investing in their future," said Lisa Bleich, president of College Bound Mentor of Westfield, a firm that helps students applying to colleges.

"It's changed in the details, but the vision is the same," said Adam Cassano, co-director of the science program and a chemistry professor at Drew. "The vision is to bring the students in, show them different sides of science they haven't been able to see in high school, expose them to equipment they're unlikely to be able to have access, show them how difficult science is to do."

To attend, students must be nominated by their schools and complete a rigorous application, which includes writing six essays, Bleich said.

Matt Middleton, associate director of admissions at the College of New Jersey, said Governor's School is an impressive part of a college application, he said.

The New Jersey Governor's School was started by Gov. Tom Kean, and once included six programs. But after a \$1.6 million state funding cut by Gov. Jon Corzine in 2006 reduced state funding to \$100,000, private donations had to cover most of the cost.

Today, the Governor's School in the Sciences is one of two remaining programs. The other, hosted by Rutgers University, studies engineering and technology.

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The Drew program cost about \$330,000 this year. The state still provides \$50,000 for each of the two programs.

Laura Overdeck of Westfield, a 1986 Governor's School alumnus, is on the board of overseers.

Overdeck said there are hopes to "relaunch" the environmental school.

"Society needs environmental experts that have scientific background," she said.

David Miyamoto, who recently retired as director of the program at Drew, said the students in the Governor's School are "really top-notch" and many go into science careers.

Most notable among the alumni is Nobel Prize-winner Adam Riess, an astrophysicist who received the international science prize in 2011 for his work proving the universe is accelerating, not decelerating. The 1987 graduate of Governor's School visited last summer, and wowed students there.

Students say they like the experience, too. They take classes, work on research projects in teams, live in dorms and get to socialize with science-minded peers through things like pizza dinners and trivia nights.

Daniel Li, 17, a senior at Verona High School who hopes to go to medical school, called Governor's School a "life-changing experience." He said students have already formed a Facebook group to keep in touch.

"It's been a great research opportunity and the environment is pretty similar to college," he said. "I've gone to other summer programs where you pay to go, but in all honesty, this program outclasses all of those."